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The members of the family and the local officials went ahead with the ablutions and last toilet of the deceased. They wrapped the body in a shroud of white cotton material, and it was then placed temporarily on a mattress surrounded by green branches, flowers and a large number of yellow wax candles which were kept constantly lit and replaced as necessary.

A shed was built in the garden of the house to serve as a kitchen, for it would be necessary to prepare various foods--rice, cakes, etc.--both day and night without any respite. This food would be offered to all comers--relatives, friends, neighbors and even passersby--up to the day of cremation.

Visitors soon began to stream in, and no one arrived with empty hands. Everyone brought an offering proportionate to his means. Some brought a bouquet of flowers or some fruit, others brought pieces of cotton cloth, wax, firewood, rice, pork or buffalo meat, brandy, fish, etc.

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Grief took up very little of the time of the dead person's relatives and friends, for the latter quickly busied themselves with keeping their guests occupied, treating them well and being in several places at once so that the guests would lack for nothing. No sadness, moreover, was to be seen among the visitors who arrived in great hordes to profit by the windfall and take part in the funeral feasts now being prepared.

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[204] In their Pythagorean philosophy, the Laotians regard death much as any other of the vital functions which normally participates in transformations of matter, as for example conception and birth. In addition to this they are fervent disciples of Epicurus without realizing it, and love life in all its forms for the pleasures which, in spite of its brief span, it holds for individuals who can limit their needs and moderate their desires. Although they dread death during their years of youth and virility, this is not because they are afraid of it but mainly because they see in it an end to the many pleasures of life. What is more, they are old hands at finding pretexts for enjoying such pleasures and at discovering all possible propitious occasions for organized rejoicing.

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Funeral ceremonies are celebrations in the same way as marriages, assumptions of garments, births, cutting children's hair and the other public festivals which occur regularly each year at fixed times. In Laos everything ends in libations, songs and feasts, with unfettered merriment and a profusion of flowers and cloth materials whose

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Finally a silver or gold coin is placed in its mouth and he is told that earthly goods are vain and that this little thing that is pushed with difficulty between his teeth is all that the dead can take with him to the tomb. Here we find an ancient belief which the Catapatha Brahmana mentions: gold is placed in the mouths of the dead because this metal is immortal and in this way immortality can be attained. This custom is found not only in classical antiquity, but also in Japan, and China, and in the major part of eastern Asia.

After the body is put in its coffin, the latter is set on banana trunks, for as this wood has no core, so man from now on has no substance. The house has become heuan di, the happy house. The bonzes come and recite prayers over the dead which tell of the vanity of life.

"The body which the soul has left is nothing. Soon it will be as useless on earth as a dead tree.

/59/ "Life is an ephemeral thing. Birth and death follow each other without cease according to a normal ritual. After being born, one must disappear. Happiness is to enter Nirvana."

During the entire vigil (ngan) boys and girls are together; they sing, dance, drink, play. However in a corner near the bier is placed a tray filled with food for the departed.

The dead body may be kept indefinitely at the house; there is no law which forbids it. However at the present time the tendency is more and more to follow the western method. In the country, seven days after his death, the deceased is carried into a cabin erected for him in a corner of his rice field. Every day his widow and children come and keep his temporary mausoleum in good order. Every week, on the 8th, 14th and 15th days of the crescent or waning moon, they repeat their offerings to the bonzes until the fourth month, the usual date for the ceremonies marking the dry season and the work in the rice fields which has just been completed. Then an enormous pavilion is built, and under its roof work is started on erecting the men (cenotaph) and decorating it as well as the coffin. Before this work starts, the coffin has been open and the dead man's face has been washed with coconut water, symbol of purity.

The style of the coffin and the men varies according to the locality. Its decoration also varies, but often consists only of sheets of gold paper stuck onto lacquer and representing vegetable motifs, flowers and deities. In important burials, the coffin is mounted on two enormous birds drawn by means of white cotton cord by the people present. This is done less and less, especially at Vientiane where the